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SOCIALIST DISCUSSION JOURNAL  
TOWARDS BETTER UNDERSTANDING

# FORUM

## Do We Need the Dialectic?

### 2—The Case of Engels

The subject of dialectics has not received a great deal of attention in the Socialist Party. It may be thought it is of not much concern to us. Nevertheless, all sorts of ideas on the subject have flitted through the Party from time to time. We may not accept Engels's "Dialectics of Nature" or "Anti-Duhring," but at least we have never rejected them. The following article and later ones are an attempt to stimulate discussion on these lines. They may not be the whole truth or even truth at all, but they may serve to clarify issues that are badly in need of clarification.

One of Engels's jobs was to dust and polish the *objets d'art* of the Marx collection. Unfortunately, he broke some valuable things in the process and mislaid others. This is not to deny that we are indebted to his genial insight—viz., his brilliant *Peasant War in Germany*, *Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*, etc. But, alas, he bequeathed a dubious estate in *Anti-Duhring* and *The Dialectics of Nature*—an estate which the Communists have not only claimed as their own but have philosophically extended to a vast ramshackle empire—dialectical materialism.

To-day Engels plays an Aristotelian role in Russia. It is his writings in the main which constitute the sacred texts for Moscow Marxism. The wheel has turned an ironic

full circle. Once the Catholics used Aristotle against Protestantism, then the Protestants used Hegel against Atheism—and now the Communists use Engels against Marxism. That they have Hegelianized Engels is a fact. That Engels himself began the process is also a fact. When Engels was young he almost swallowed Hegel whole; when he was old, Hegel almost wholly swallowed him.

Needless to say, Hegel himself enjoys considerable prestige in the highest dialectical circles in Russia. The Leningrad Institute of Philosophy boasts that whereas in England Hegel's *Logic*—his most abstruse work—sells perhaps no more than fifty-odd copies a year, in Russia editions of it run into tens of thousands. Truly, dialectics in reverse—a jump from quality to quantity. Even as far back as 1917 Lenin, in the throes of the Russian Civil War, exhorted his fellow-Bolsheviks to constitute themselves into a "Society of the Materialistic Friends of the Hegelian Dialectic."

It is also true that Hegel's glorification of the State as the political Absolute and the realization of concrete freedom are current elements in the Russian state ideology. Whether Hegel intended his state philosophy to furnish political grammars for totalitarian regimes is a matter outside the present orbit.

In the hands of the Communists the dialectic has provided a mystique and allowed them to indulge in pseudo-scientific fortunetelling. At the same time, it has evolved into an authoritarian state ideology, capable of being twisted into the most fantastic shapes to justify the pretexts of the Russian ruling cliques in order to preserve their power. There is something ludicrously tragic in the fact that the alleged charges against Trotsky, Radek, Rykof, Bukharin and others were given a "dialectical" formulation. Their alleged errors consisted in their inability to understand the finer nuances of dialectical polarity and in consequence the mechanistic twist which was given to the interpenetration of opposites (see Shirkov's *Text Book of Marxist Philosophy*).

The claim that the dialectic constitutes a higher truth has been made by all Communist

theorists since Lenin. It has also been made (though in a less exaggerated form) by Plekhanov. The hierarchic structure of this alleged truth can be seen from a statement by Deborin (who later was removed in the interests of the higher truth): "While all dialecticians are and must be communists, not all communists are or can be dialecticians." That this "higher truth" amounts to infallibility can also be seen from the *Short History of the C.P.S.U.*, wherein it states: "The Marx-Leninist theory, i.e., the dialectic, enables the Party to find the right orientation in any situation . . . and to say in what direction they are bound to develop."

No-one wants to visit the sins of the children too heavily upon the fathers; nevertheless, some of the broadbased views in the philosophic system of the Communists can be traced to the paternity of Engels.

One can concede that there is much which is cogent and instructive in *Anti-Duhring*. Nevertheless, there are also claims which seem to contradict certain premises of Marxism, such as that: What independently survives of all former philosophy is the science of thought and its laws—formal logic and science of nature and history." What actually are we to infer from this? It could mean that the dialectic, along with its poor relation formal logic, has only a meagre and modest function to perform, i.e., to express in a set of logical propositions the results and significance of scientific findings.

Yet it appears that Engels assigned to the dialectic a much more ambitious role. Thus, in his *Feuerbach* he regards the dialectic as "our best working tool." He also holds that it constitutes the highest form of thinking. And on page 158 of *Anti-Duhring* he declares: "Dialectics is nothing more than the science of the general laws of motion and development of nature, human society and thought."

All this seems self-contradictory and confusing. In the first place we are led to believe that the dialectic is another name for scientific method. If that is so, then it

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consists of rules and disciplines for valid thinking. Yet on the other hand it is asserted that dialectics means laws of nature. We are asked to believe that it is both canons of thinking and laws of nature. It might be argued that dialectics is either or the other but cannot be both. Sometimes it is suggested that the dialectic is simply a methodological principle seeking to discover the behaviour of natural phenomena. But dialectics also claims to have formulated universal laws of nature and should not have to ask how nature works because it knows how it works, *i.e.*, according to dialectical principles. The only thing left for a dialectic is the refinement of details based on dialectical principles.

Even more serious issues are raised by this ambivalence between "laws of thinking" and "laws of nature." If, as we are led to believe, the laws of nature are an eternal dialectical process, then all our thinking must reflect this process and our ideas are but copies of an eternal, dialectical, objective reality. That they are "dialectical" copies does not alter the position—they are still copies. Yet here it seems that Engels was assuming what it was really up to him to prove: that is, that our ideas (copies, images) were identical with objective reality.

It is true that Engels in *Anti-Duhring* also said that "modern materialism is essentially dialectical" and Engels's statement that formal logic and dialectics are "the science of thought and its laws" may, of course, be taken to mean that the dialectic does nothing more than sum up in the most appropriate manner the findings of science. To this even the modern positivists might not seriously object. However, it is not consistent with Engels's viewpoint stated elsewhere. Indeed if that were the role of the dialectic it would be almost superfluous. Yet one gathers from Engels's writings that he held the general principles of the dialectic were of great importance. While he may have granted an autonomy to each science, he seems to have held fast to the idea that although each science had its own "laws" they were in turn subject to the universal principles to which the name dialectic is given. And it is this authoritative character which Engels gave to the dialectic that has been incorporated into the official philosophy of the Russian ruling elite.

If, as it seems, Engels held the view that our ideas reflect objective reality and this reality is a dialectical one, then we must think dialectically whether we are aware of it or not. The only difference between a dialectician and (if it is permissible to use the term) a non-dialectician is that the first has some to self-consciousness—a thorough-going piece of Hegelianism. Indeed, Engels himself tells us on page 159 of *Anti-Duhring*: "Men thought dialectically, long before they knew what dialectics was. Just as they spoke prose long before the term prose existed." Now it is true that long before Hegel men had recognized that opposites go together: that water can turn into ice and a caterpillar become a butterfly.

But all this is a far step from asserting that nature itself is subject to universal dialectical laws, which can be subsumed under the headings of "the unity of opposites," "negation of the negation" and "the change of quantity into quality and *vice-versa*."

With all due respect to Engels, he never made out a case on behalf of this. What he did was to assert that nature, including mind, renewed and perpetuated itself in accordance with a dialectical principle. In short, his was a theory of cosmic design. Engels did say, unlike Hegel that the universe for him was a material universe, but seeing he had endowed his "matter" with the same creative properties which Hegel had at least more consistently given as attributes of "the idea," the difference between Hegel and Engels is merely formal.

Again, Engels's view of the dialectic laid him under a heavy obligation to show that science itself was based on dialectical principles. It is true that in *Anti-Duhring* and in *The Dialectics of Nature* he offers some examples, but they are in no way convincing. For example, we are not greatly informed by being told that the North and South poles of a magnet are a unity of opposites. The peculiar molecular structure and behaviour of a piece of iron when magnetized was the subject of an investigation which required no dialectical formulation. We know that one cannot have a battery without a positive and a negative cell—a "unity of opposites"—but this does not explain the processes which go to make it. To show how electrical energy is converted into electric potential owes nothing to the mystical formulæ of dialectics. Students in electricity would do not better if they studied dialectics. Indeed, if they were cluttered with its jargon and preconceived ideas they might be worse.

In actual fact, Engels merely interpreted certain scientific findings. Anyone can interpret them—Engels, Hegel, Bergson or a Jehovah's Witness. What is more pertinent is to ask what scientific discovery has been made on the methodological principle of the dialectic. While Engels was an ardent student of the natural sciences, he was not a physicist or a chemist. Nor was he a biologist or a geologist. In fact, wherever science went, Engels was forced to follow. He might argue that the scientific discoveries of his day were in accordance with dialectical procedure, but he could only be wise after the event. There was nothing in the alleged methodological principles of the dialectic to demonstrate that it could extend those scientific discoveries which Engels accepted into further discoveries. Engels himself accepted the scientific views of his age. Many turned out to be wrong, yet the dialectic gave him no clue as to where they were wrong.

It is perfectly legitimate deduction from Engels's writings to assume that he made the dialectic synonymous with scientific method. Or, to put it another way, scientific procedure itself was based upon dialectical

principles *vide* Engels. Yet Engels never satisfactorily showed how the three laws of the dialectic—viz., the unity of opposites, the negation of the negation and the transformation of quantity into quality—are parts of disciplines, or analytical tools of scientific investigation in physics, chemistry, biology, etc.

No doubt Engels was eager to give to Marxism a universal philosophy. What he failed, it seems, to see in his later years was that Marxism needed no such philosophy: not the philosophy of dialectical materialism, whether it was Engels's or the metaphysics of Dietzgen, or the neo-positivism of people like Bogdanov and to some extent Bukharin. Marxism in my view is a strictly empirical and scientific investigation of historical causation. It is not called upon to take sides in matters of scientific dispute. Nor has it the warrant or qualification to do so. Whether a person is a Marxist is not decided by his holding a view of the quantum theory as against the more mechanistic concept. He may even accept Newton as against Einstein without impugning his orthodoxy. In fact, he may know nothing about any of those theories—and still be a Marxist.

There is another grave confusion which exists in regard to Engels's views on the dialectic. We are told, as has already been mentioned, that all thinking is but a reflection of objective reality. (A view in direct contrast to Marx's—see *Theses on Feuerbach*—which will subsequently be dealt with). And yet we are told by Engels that all existence, *i.e.*, matter and motion, is self-contradictory. If that is so, then thought itself is self-contradictory, and in that case all thinking which is clear and consistent must be undialectical thinking and hence false thinking. But surely the task of all correct thinking is to understand the contradictions involved in the evolution of ideas. It may be said that understanding the contradictions does not necessarily get rid of them. Thus, as Marxists, we understand the contradictions of capitalism, but the system remains. Nevertheless, we can maintain that by understanding these contradictions our thinking is clear and consistent and free from being self-contradictory.

Again, it may be said that if we can examine two propositions, both of which are acceptable, nevertheless they help us to constitute a point of departure which can help us to steer clear of the errors contained in both. Surely, the whole point so far as logical thinking is concerned is to attempt to give an adequate and coherent account of any problem we are trying to understand. To say, for instance, that the positive pole of a battery contradicts the negative one—using the language of dialectics—is not, when we understand the process which makes for electrical polarity, to be committed to self-contradictory thinking. Dialecticians may, of course, say that nevertheless the contradiction of cell polarity remains, yet there is no contradiction in our own thinking. This makes it difficult to discover

actually what Engels means by the statement that all existence is self-contradictory.

Moreover, when Engels uses the term contradiction he holds that there is a tension between and within phenomena themselves which in turn leads to conflict and, through conflict, development. Thus, he gives the same order of reality to things as he does to logical propositions. From the standpoint of dialectics we can say that the North pole is opposed to the South. To suggest that this is as valid as saying the working class is

opposed to the capitalist class is absurd. In fact, it is difficult to understand when referring to natural phenomena what the term opposition actually implies. Engels himself used the term as recklessly as Hegel. If it really means in regard to phenomena that some things are in contrast with others, or that certain things exist in polarity, then the idea of a dialectic in nature, with its thesis, antithesis and synthesis involving opposition, conflict and reconciliation, must be dropped. But in that case the dialectic goes by the board.

We have perhaps said enough to at least illustrate some of the difficulties in the way of accepting the dialectic as a universal law. In the next article, it is proposed to go a little more into detail on some of the aspects raised and to deal with other aspects of dialectics. Nevertheless, it seems to me easy to see how Communists have been able to raise the superstructure of a mystique on the basis of Engels's *Anti-Duhring* and *Dialectics of Nature*.

E.W.

## OILY ELECTIONS IN AUSTRIA

Socialists have always pointed out that nationalisation, also called "Public ownership," of certain or all industries leaves the position of the workers as a disinherited class, untouched. Decades of actual experience (the Post Office and in numerous countries the railways and other industries have always been State-controlled) have proved the correctness of our contention. Advocates of nationalisation like the "Socialist" Party of Austria (S.P.O.), the Labour Party in England, and kindred organisations elsewhere, cannot ignore the fact either and indeed admit it, on occasion. Thus we have quoted before now that a writer in the Vienna *Arbeiter Zeitung* pointed out that "The transfer of all private capital to the State does not by a long way exclude the exploitation of the working-class—it is in truth *FAR from being socialism*." The late Jean Jaurès called the attempt to identify State ownership with Socialism a "colossal swindle."

Yet, the leaders of these parties continue to foster and nurse this swindle and thereby to delude the workers and distract them from sound revolutionary action, which alone can alter their status from being mere objects of exploitation to that of partners in the social wealth.

The principal catchword of the S.P.O. in the coming General Election will be this swindle that the nationalisation of the oil industry means ownership by the people of Austria. If, with their short memories or lack of proper understanding of political affairs in the world at large, one cannot perhaps expect the average Austrian worker to remember such experiences as the nationalisation of the oil industry in Persia, he has had enough experiences near at home to see through that swindle and to know that nationalisation is no remedy for mass poverty and insecurity. But not only would it be ridiculous for anyone to imagine that nationalisation of the oil industry in Persia meant ownership by those who extract that wealth there, but it did not even mean ownership by the Persian capitalist govern-

ment. It continues to be owned and controlled by a bunch of foreign capitalists; in this case, the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. The Austrian oil industry is in a similar position. Before the war, American, British, Dutch and other capitalist groups controlled it, until it all became German property, only to be seized by the Soviet government as booty after the war. Their allies' interests in the industry could however not simply be blotted out, and after 10 years of squabbling, a Treaty was signed in May, 1955, settling matters between them and the Austrian government. An article ("Liberation and Loot in Austria") in the S.S. for July, 1955, gave some details on this much talked about, much obscured and generally little understood treaty. This Treaty makes it clear however that the greater part of the Austrian oilfields, with buildings, constructions, equipment and other undertakings and property is controlled and exploited by Russian, American, British and other foreign capital, and that for that part of "property, rights and interests . . . which the Soviet Union shall transfer to Austria," the Soviet government must be compensated in the amount of 150,000,000 dollars.

In the last resort, it is the onerous conditions attaching to this Treaty, the financial difficulties arising in connection with its execution, and starting with the exploitation of what fields are left to Austria (and left practically devoid of any installations) that caused the breakdown of the government coalition and the call for a new Election. The policy of more nationalisation does not commend itself to those groups of capitalists supporting the Volkspartei; they think they can do better with "private" enterprise and calling in the aid and co-operation of still more foreign capital! Hence the accusation by the *Arbeiter Zeitung* that Chancellor Raab "wants to steal this liquid gold from the Austrian people." The opponents of nationalisation however also proclaim it to be their policy that, in the words of Chancellor Raab, "this liquid

gold must be and remain the property of the whole Austrian people."

Cute capitalist business managers as the present bosses of Russia are, they took less risks even than their allies when making the Treaty with Austria. In the event of nationalisation, clause 7 (c) provides that this Soviet property "shall not be subject to expropriation without the consent of the Soviet Union."

And (d) that "Austria will not raise any difficulties in regard to the export of profits or other income (i.e., rents) in the form of output or of any freely convertible currency received."

Clause 7 (a) defines Soviet property as:

"All former German assets which have become the property of the Soviet Union in accordance with paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 of the present article (22)."

and Item (9) provides: "The Soviet Union shall likewise own the rights, property and interests in respect of all assets, wherever they may be situated in Eastern Austria, created by Soviet organisations or acquired by them by purchase after 9th May, 1945, for the operation of the properties enumerated in Lists 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5."

Now that the other allied interests (American, British, French, etc.) have also been restored as they stood before 1938, respectively 1918, and with the foreign soldiers gone, the Austrian capitalists and their managers and bosses of the two principal political parties have begun a fight between themselves, the latter of course for the jobs. They accuse one another of bungling, of selling out "our" oil, and a multitude of other villainies and corruptions particularly typical of Election campaigns. This miserable and ever recurring game alone ought to be enough to convince the voters that they are being fooled and humbugged by both parties. It amounts to an insult of the workers' intelligence, but then whatever great aptitudes and skill they show in the field of producing the wealth of the

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Centuries measure history; we tend inevitably to think of them as dividing history too, setting it up in tidy packages marked nineteenth-century this and twentieth-century that. Nothing so handy happens. Most of the movements, styles and phenomena which we see as characteristically twentieth-century derive from or are part of the nineteenth. The only dividing line which matters between the Industrial Revolution and now lies at something under a hundred years ago—between the era of absolute surplus-value and that of relative surplus-value.

Thus, the "new" sociological literature of the early nineteen-hundreds showed only the later Victorians' belief in collectivism come to the best-selling stage. Ideas follow material facts, and in turn change them to other facts. The growth of the State in the last quarter of the nineteenth century produced Carlyle and Ruskin damning *laissez-faire*, urging benevolent dictatorship by the strong and the wise; T. H. Green talking on *The Principles of Political Obligation*; Mill arguing for social as against individualistic utility and proposing State control over wealth distribution as the ideal means. In the fifty years before 1914, orthodoxy and heterodoxy changed places. Shaw, Galsworthy and Wells were the latter, triumphant prophets of what Matthew Arnold called "the nation in its collective and corporate capacity controlling as government the full swing of its members in the name of the higher reason of all."

Shaw put his arguments as plays because it had become the fashion to do so. The theatre returned to life in the last quarter of the century, largely *via* the serious, semi-sociological plays of Henry Arthur Jones and Pinero; Shaw's cue came from Ibsen and Brieux, with their bold (so bold that Brieux was banned and the first Ibsen performances in London caused uproar) treatment of social questions and their plea for enlightenment. With so much preaching and teaching, it is not surprising that Shaw's plays do not really live for all their sparkle. The players are puppets expounding tabulated wisdom; the sparkle is that of first-rate discussion, but never of living people and living situations.

While the State became the Father, the Empah was the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of "the white man's burden" was not exclusively English; France, Belgium, Germany were founding colonial empires too. Kipling was not the first or only writer of fervent, Empah-struck verse—W. E. Henley in the 'eighties stirred adolescents of all ages with his—

"Take us, break us, we are yours,  
England, my own."

Kipling happened along at the right time, however, catching the popular fancy with his soldier ballads in the Boer War and when Army reorganization was calling for a different attitude to the time-serving soldier. In recent years there has been an attempt to re-value Kipling, putting forward that the "lesser breeds without the Law" of whom he wrote were not fuzzy-wuzzies at all but the totalitarians. It makes hardly a difference. The essence of Kipling is, as was once said in another connection, "that the members of each nation believe their national civilization to be Civilization."

The poetical forms and traditions set up by the romantics—Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and their contemporaries—lasted into the twentieth century: so much so, in fact, that most of us were brought up to regard poetry in their terms alone. They were products of the Industrial Revolution's assault on men's minds, and they came in question when industrialism reached a later stage. The petrol engine and the electric motor cracked new whips; the towns reached out afresh, and leisure became mechanised as work.

The first complete break with tradition was, in fact, made by Gerard Manley Hopkins, the monk who died in 1889. His poems, written in near-isolation, were so much different from everything else in their time that they were not published until 1918: that is, until the "modern" movement to which they belonged had sprung from other sources. A three-volume "Cyclopaedia of Literature" issued in 1921 does not include even the name of the poet who, in Tennyson's heyday, was writing this sort of thing:—

"Some candle clear burns somewhere I  
come by.  
I muse at how its being puts blissful back  
With yellow moisture mild night's blear-  
all black,  
Or to-fro tender trambeams truckle at  
the eye."

The poets of the nineteen-twenties were yet more hectic in their break with romantic tradition and their search (strengthened by the discovery of Freud) for a language of the mind. Wordsworth had laid down that poetry's imagery should come from things of undisputed natural beauty; and now here was T. S. Eliot with—

"... the evening is spread out against  
the sky  
Like a patient etherised upon a table."

and a hundred more unlovely, but effective,

"In every historical epoch, the prevailing mode of economic production and exchange, and the social organization necessarily following from it, form the basis upon which is built up, and from which alone can be explained, the political and intellectual history of that epoch."

MARX.

images. The world had become a more clinical, less romantic place—and since almost nobody read poetry, what matter if almost nobody understood it? Much "modern" poetry has been obscure for obscurity's sake. At its best, however, it is a valuable way of saying important things. Because of their concern with subjectivity, the poets of the last generation have been pressed along paths of social criticism—the reason why they were easy prey for the Communists in the 'thirties, and why works like Eliot's *The Waste Land* are worth anybody's attention.

Criticism of another kind came from the minor versifiers who, when Rupert Brooke had finished thanking God for the excitement, saw through at least the humbug of the first World War. There were the calm humanitarianism of Lawrence Housman, and the sad, bitter poetry of Siegfried Sassoon:—

"You smug-faced crowds with kindling  
eye

Who cheer when soldier-lads march by,  
Sneak home and pray you'll never know

The hell where youth and laughter go." Inevitably, more was satire than anything else, and inevitably, because satire is more ephemeral than most things, most has been forgotten. A pity, because some of those poems were minor masterpieces—like J. C. Squire's:—

"All hail to the war for the blessings it  
brings! And how could one estimate  
which

Are the greater, the gains that accrue to  
the poor or the benefits reaped by the  
rich?

As life became more and more atomized, less and less social, writers of all kinds turned to the study of the individual. Not the individual rampant, as in the nineteenth century, but the individual from within, isolated, introspective and insecure. The accepted story-pattern of scene, plot, climax and outcome was no longer integral to the novel; consciousness as a theme in itself came forward—a pre-occupation which led from Dorothy Richardson's and Virginia Woolf's mind-portraits to the tremendous libido-haunted James Joyce epics. And one question thrust through it all: what was civilization doing to man?

Scientists occasionally have shown that various creatures, subjected to pressure against their instincts, become either stupid or cussed. Show rats the certainty of food and they play tricks about it, and at some stage they turn perverse; manufacture the circum-

stances, and you may make a sheep neurotic. The set-up for such games with animals must be artificial, a product of laboratory conditions and curiosity. For man, however, it is the product of modern civilization, a social effect of social circumstances. Thus, the writers of this age have more and more become writers against this age because of what it does to men, and none has been more fiercely against it than D. H. Lawrence.

What separates Lawrence from most other writers of his time is his tremendous desire to find and elevate physical and mental health in people—best seen if one compares his work with that of, say, Thomas Mann or T. S. Eliot, each of them having a strong distaste for life as he sees it. Lawrence is supremely the man frustrated by modern industrial society, looking for and excited by the symbols of anything better: some of his stories, indeed, are only preoccupations with single symbols—*The Plumed Serpent*, for example. And to a large extent the characters in his novels are symbols, too. In *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, the impotent husband is the upper class, the gamekeeper the instinctive, vital man who holds the key for humanity. How Lawrence hated “the god-damned bourgeoisie”! How, too, he exalted the physical as against the technical and intellectual:—

“ Give me the body. I believe the life of the body is a greater reality than the life of the mind: when the body is really wakened to life. But so many people, like your famous wind machine, have only got minds tacked on to their physical corpses.

He looked at her in wonder. ‘ The life of the body,’ he said, ‘ is just the life of the animals.’

‘ And that’s better than the life of professorial corpses. But it’s not true! The human body is only just coming to real life. With the Greeks it gave a lovely flicker, then Plato and Aristotle killed it, and Jesus finished it off. But now the body is coming really to life, it is really rising from the tomb.’

Though he began among them, Lawrence never really saw working people, otherwise than romantically; that is why his novels stimulate but do not communicate. Fifty years ago, as the tide of working-class consciousness rose (soon to run miserably away down the drains of social reform) the hope was strong that the movement would produce its own literature. Very little came, and what there was is almost forgotten: who, to-day, knows Francis Adams’s *Songs of the Army of the Night*, or has heard of *George Meek, Bath-Chair Man*? The one exception—perhaps because it is an exceptional book in every way—is *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*. Here and there have been other works: *The Man With the Hoe*, Jack London’s two or three with more Superman than Socialism, Lionel Britton’s *Hunger and Love* (head and shoulders above the rest) and, if one throws in *The Day Is Coming*, that is virtually all.

On the other hand, the novel has increasingly become the medium for certain kinds of social criticism. A good deal has been said in recent years about the decline of the novel. Certainly, several of its former functions have been usurped by the cinema, radio, television and popular journalism: in the creation of popular heroes, for instance, Pickwick falls behind Charlie Chaplin and no writer can hope to rival such phenomena as Davy Crockett. “ Decline ” is the wrong word, however. What has happened is that the novel has changed its character and assumed one which is necessarily more ephemeral. As V. S. Pritchett wrote a few years ago in *New Writing*: “ The chief character is no longer the hero, the heroine or the villain but, in a large number of novels, is really an impersonal shadow, a presence that we may call ‘ the contemporary situation ’ ”.

The dominant literary attitude of the last twenty-five years has been the desire for “ realism ” in one form or another. There is nothing at all realistic about most of it; about the telegraph-language gangster novel, for example, or the mock-Hemingway love-and-guts saga. These, paradoxically, are romanticism in its simplest form—the straight escape from reality into day dream worlds. The aim of the realist writer proper was stated by Balzac:—

“ By adhering to the strict lines of a reproduction, a writer might be a more or less faithful and more or less successful painter of types of humanity, a narrator of the dramas of private life, an archaeologist of social furniture, a cataloguer of professions, a registrar of good and evil; but to deserve the praise of which every artist is most ambitious, must I not also investigate the reasons or the causes of these social effects, detect the hidden sense of this vast assembly of figures, passions and accidents ? ”

The *genre* known as “ social realism ” has nothing to do with that process; it consists of gathering facts journalist-fashion and grafting ideas on them—i.e., of conscious propaganda-writing. Great works can be and are propaganda (think only of Zola), but the unvarying banality of post-revolution literature in Russia, where “ social realism ” is the writer’s Scout Promise, suggests clearly enough that ordinary realism does much better.

What makes a good book? Ultimately, posterity judges, but there are standards and principles of criticism which basically are the same principles needed for objective judgment of anything. What is the writer’s intention: what does he aim to show, tell or arouse? Does he succeed in it? What is his attitude to his readers (revealed in the language he chooses)—and to his own subject-matter? There are many more questions, of course, but those provide a useful start.

There is more bilge written in our age than the history of literature can ever find before; it is, in fact, a craft on its own, the taste for it promoted and standardised by the

threepenny libraries and the book clubs. Pulp literature is easily recognizable and condemnable, but it is less easy to recognize that the respectable “ best-seller ” usually differs from it only by lacking pulp’s crudity of presentation. The secret of success for the Cronins, Deepings, Priestleys and the rest is that they set out to by-pass thought and re-affirm to the reader his own sentiments and prejudices: a pat on the back for the middle-income groups, a slick reassurance about practically everything.

What of the future? While commercialism dominates everything it has to dominate literature too; that is, there have to be a thousand Priestleys for every Proust. Suggestions as to the role and nature of literature under different, better circumstances—in what Marx referred to as “ human ” as against “ civil ” society—have to be largely guesses. Certainly there will be no Art in the capital ‘ A ’ sense of any kind, and certainly there will be no pounding-out of *What the Public Wants*. Literature will communicate knowledge and ideas, of course; what else it communicates rests on whatever people discover themselves to need. This writer likes to think that there will be a great deal more singing and speaking of verse than reading of it; that the pleasures of the flesh will be celebrated instead of the dolours of the spirit; that, in fact, people will be like the animals of Whitman’s poem—

“ Not one is respectable or unhappy over the whole earth ”—  
and they will have a literature to show it.

Finally, what has been the purpose of all this? Primarily, to show the social mainsprings of one part of human activity. Historical Materialism is often invoked in principle, in the general statement that language, science, art, religion, techniques and skills are superstructure on the base of simple economic organization; less often to explain just how, in this or that instance, the superstructure got there. However precious the analytical tool, it ought to be used to analyze something. Nor is it merely for analysis’ own sake. Vital issues are involved. Marxists repudiate the “ great man ” theory: Marxists must be prepared to offer, not counter-assertion, but real explanation of Caesars, Newtons and Shakespeares.

Literature itself plays a not insignificant part in the study of history, illuminating the historian’s more or less objective study with its subjective record of men’s feelings and aspirations. There are fifty good histories of Rome, but Petronius’s account of the vulgar Roman arriviste lets one in on the contemporary scene in a different way; a score of books about the city-states of Italy, but none with the special vividness of Cellini’s *Memoirs*; unnumbered descriptions of the way people lived a hundred years ago, but Zola’s and Flaubert’s going under the skin. And to-day, for all the psychological and sociological studies, popular literature (along with advertising) is probably nearer than anything else to public consciousness.

R. COSTER.

# CARSON McCULLERS

The subject of the first article in this series was William Faulkner, an American novelist, who writes mainly about the South. Carson McCullers is another American whose novels are set mainly in the South, but there the similarity ends. McCullers writes in a much clearer and more straightforward manner than does Faulkner and generally speaking, her characters spring from a completely different world. The people in her novels, are generally "much nearer home" in the sense that they are often working-class town-dwellers who lead lives recognisably akin to our own, whereas Faulkner writes almost entirely of impoverished Southern aristocrats, misfits, criminals and the like.

Very few of her novels and stories have been published in this country, but those that have so far appeared have been of an extremely high quality. One of them—*The Member of the Wedding*—has been filmed by Stanley Kramer and those who have seen the film will have gained a fairly accurate idea of McCullers' approach, for the film was an extremely successful adaptation of the book, which is an account of an adolescent girl suffering the pangs of growing-up.

This novel, which is probably the most appealing of Carson McCullers' novels, deals with this girl, Frankie, and her development through adolescence. She is plain, awkward, and almost friendless, and considers herself too old to play with the children in the dust of the streets, but she in turn is considered too young to be allowed to join the local youth club. Her brother, on his return from the forces, is about to be married, and Frankie, in her loneliness, fixes all her hopes and desires upon the wedding and decides to go away with them. Eventually of course, the result is unhappy disillusionment, and near-tragedy, but the resulting impression is not one of morbidity but of what Walter Allen called "the beauty that comes from a comprehensive and quite unsentimental pity for her characters." The other main characters in the novel, John Henry, the little boy next door, and the Negro cook-housekeeper, are also drawn sympathetically and the total picture is that of a sympathetic presentation of life as it really is and not a glorified picture-postcard substitute.

Her characters, particularly the children, are in general, human and likeable, drawn with a firmness and delineation that is quite unlike Faulkner, and as one reads, one can feel the characters developing during the course of the narrative. There is also no lack of ideas in her novels. *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, for instance, contains characters with various shades of left-wing views. There is the old Negro doctor who is embittered by his people's struggles and wishes to lead Negro marchers to the Capital to seek human rights for his down-trodden people. Then there is the wanderer who thinks that the Negro problem is only one of the many social problems, which itself merits no special attention, and who considers that marches and the like merely fritter away the resources of the working class and who is *etc!* for spreading the word of the revolution. The resulting argument between them reads almost like a Hyde Park wrangle.

This novel is an account of how four people's lives become entangled by their association with a mute who becomes their confidante. The Negro doctor; the labour agitator; a lonely and philosophical cafe proprietor; and an adolescent girl, all turn to the mute as the one person who can help them sort out their own problems and ease their frustrations, although ironically, he is not really in sympathy with any one of them, and a large part of the time he does not even understand what they are talking about. The mute's death leaves a void in their lives and life becomes once more drab and lonely. The wanderer continues on his way, the cafe proprietor goes back to his observation of people, the Negro doctor is forced to rest from his struggles by serious illness, and the girl, who feels cheated by life, goes to work in Woolworths for a few dollars a week—"What good was it? That was the question she would like to know. What the hell good it was. All the plans she had made, and the music. When all that came of it was this trap—the store, then home to sleep, and back at the store again. The clock in front of the place where Mr. Singer used to work pointed to seven. And she was just getting off. Whenever there was overtime the manager always told her to stay. Because she could stand longer on her feet and work harder before giving out than any other girl.") As an examina-

tion of Southern small town life the book is fascinating and extremely readable, but more than this, as a tale of human beings' attitudes to and their struggles against the crushing weight of capitalism's problems and frustrations, the book is a near-masterpiece.

*Reflections in a Golden Eye* is a novel in a completely different vein to the two mentioned above. It deals with the lives of officers, their wives and a private soldier in an American army camp in peace time. The suspense and tragedy of the story is admirably drawn, as are the character portraits of the soldiers, their officers and the officers' ladies. The viciousness, monotony and pointlessness of army life is portrayed to great effect. ("One old corporal wrote a letter every night to Shirley Temple making it a sort of diary of all that he had done during the day and mailing it before breakfast next morning.") The horror of these people's empty lives leads up to a climax of tragedy which is as impressive as almost anything in modern literature.

Another short novel, *The Ballad of the Sad Cafe*, is a somewhat Faulknerish tale of stunted lives in an American backwoods town. It has all the remarkable insight and invention of Faulkner with what most people would consider the added advantage of a clear prose style and sympathy which that writer lacks.

McCullers has been described (by David Garnett) as "the best living American writer" and if one's criterion of good literature requires humanity and sympathy of approach as well as sheer brilliant writing, then this statement is probably not far wrong. As V. S. Pritchett has described her she is "the most remarkable writer to come out of America for a generation. Like all writers of original genius she conceives that we have missed something that was plainly to be seen in the real world . . . an incomparable story-teller."

This brief summary can only give a bald and inadequate outline of McCullers' work but anyone who takes the trouble to get hold of her novels and short stories will not be disappointed—there is a freshness, warmth and skill in her writing that is unmistakable, and that this writer finds irresistible.

A.W.I.

# SOCIALISM AND RELIGION

*Communism and Christianity*, by Martin D'Arcy, S. J. (Penguin Books, 2s. 6d.); *Socialism and the Churches*, by Rosa Luxemburg (Vanguard Pamphlets, 6d.).

*Communism and Christianity* is subtitled "An examination of the Christian and Communist philosophies in their view of human life and happiness": a misleading description, if ever there was one. Father D'Arcy's examinations are reminiscent of the interviews for a job which has already been spoken for; the one candidate eyed and turned down, his qualifications unasked for, the other hailed and accepted because he is, after all, the Chairman's brother.

The writer's case is that "Communism and Christianity have... both of them the interest of society and of the world at heart, and they stand over against one another pledged to different means and to different ideals"; that, weighing them against each other, only in Christian beliefs can be found "an efficacious programme for building up individual character, social good and international peace." Appearing near the end of the book, these are presented as conclusions, but it is impossible to treat them as such, since they conclude nothing. The preceding argument is no argument at all but a ridiculously uninformed account of Marxism and a fervent pæan of Christian faith.

Father D'Arcy wants nothing to do with Marx's economics and has nothing to do with the Materialist Conception of History. For him Marxism means "the dialectic," which he lays down thus: "Dialectic expresses the way the mind works; it is the very procedure whereby it finds truth... Marx, however, transferred this mental operation to the processes of nature, and claimed that nature too, and for him this meant all reality, consisted of a dialectical movement." And again: "But Marx meant his view to be the complete answer to life and to its problems, to be a philosophy which was complete in its truth and the fulcrum to change the world... all that happens proceeds inevitably from the ground truth that matter is in motion and obeys a dialectical principle."

That may exist in Father D'Arcy's imagination; it certainly has no source of any kind whatever in Marx's works. It is

apparent that Father D'Arcy's reading of Marx is limited: practically all of his references are not to Marx at all but to the least distinguished commentators—Sheed, Alexander, Miller, MacIntyre, Douglas Hyde and Charles Lowry, whose obsession with Marx the Jew seems to have infected him. The unfortunate thing is that a good many people are going to read this travesty and believe they are being informed.

The social effects of Marxism are, of course, pointed out as existing in Russia. Father D'Arcy refers to the purges, the brain-washing and the rest and says he doesn't want it. Agreed; but isn't that Catholicism too? Conscious of the impending criticism, he pleads that these were once social norms: "At Oxford in past days the University exercised the power of life and death over students: in schools during the nineteenth century corporal punishment to our eyes brutal was administered day in day out. It is, therefore, hardly to be expected that the Church," etc. In other words, the outlook and attitudes of the Catholic Church are socially conditioned—a fact which elsewhere Father D'Arcy flatly denies.

This apart, no reasoned statement is made of Christianity's role in the theme of the book—human life and happiness. Marxism, in the writer's view, "covers a mystery with words and prevents the Marxist from tackling the problem fairly and squarely." That is as good a comment as any on his own "argument" for Christianity, which is conveyed in such terms as: "But the divine providence which leaves no one out works through the divine event, which, like the music of Orpheus, gathers both savage and human to its sound, that is, the advent of Christ; for I being lifted up 'will draw all things to myself. Mankind has a mysterious unity, and by what may be called its 'collective unconscious,' it adapts itself and responds to the still unknown and supernatural vocation of God.' What is one supposed to make of this sort of thing?

The issues involved, and how not to meet them, are put forth in *Socialism and the Churches*. Written in 1905 as an indictment of the Czarist State Church, it gives an excellent summary in a dozen pages of the origins and growth of Christianity—pointing out, for example, that "while the Catholic Church in former times undertook

to bring help to the Roman proletariat, by the preaching of communism, equality and fraternity, in the capitalist period it acted in a wholly different fashion. It sought above all to profit from the poverty of the people; to put cheap labour to work."

The pamphlet is concerned with the part played by the clergy in Russia against the Social-Democratic movement. It refers to the Church's wealth and the exploitation it not only encouraged but shared in; shows, in fact, that the place of the Church is on the side of the ruling class. It is a pity that the conclusions fall far short of the rest and come down to assuring all concerned that "Social-Democracy in no way fights against religious beliefs. On the contrary, it demands complete freedom of conscience for every individual and the widest possible toleration for every faith and every opinion."

This is the old "religion a private affair" argument of Social-Democrats everywhere. By its reference to toleration of opinion it is plausible, but in fact it omits a vital part of the Socialist case against religion. Religious institutions stand to the detriment of the working class: so do religious ideas. Rosa Luxemburg excepts from her indictment churchmen "who are full of goodness and pity and who do not seek gain; these are always ready to help the poor." Their mission remains to spread beliefs which are a barrier to understanding of the world. Without the beliefs, the institutions would mean little.

The case of modern Russia pinpoints the failings of both these books. The Polish Socialist Party, who published *Socialism and the Churches* secretly in 1905, merged into the Russian Social-Democratic Party—the Bolsheviks; for the reasons Rosa Luxemburg gives, they helped banish religion after the Revolution—and then found that a party running a modern state needed religion after all. *Communism and Christianity* leaves the same point untouched: Father D'Arcy misses it altogether when he treats the dialectic as the religion of Russia. It may be an official philosophy, but the millions who have scarcely heard of it are fed on mythology and magical obstetrics by the Orthodox Church while the ruling clique claps its hands. And that is what religions are for.

CORTES.

world, the working-class are so far betraying amazingly little political intelligence and maturity. Though, along with discontent, apathy (a bad thing) and abstaining from voting is ever growing, it is almost pathetic to see most workers still taking sides in their exploiters' troubles and squabbles. Whereas they should treat with derision all this talk of "our" oil, and whatever is put over in the press and from the platform controlled by the master class, the latter can still find dupes enough and to spare to vote for the continuation of their murderous system. Is it so difficult to realize that even if all these property rights of foreign capitalists were renounced by them tomorrow, the Austrian working-class would still *not own* even one drop of "our" oil? If nationalised, it would still be controlled by State-bond and shareholders, and the industry would of course be operated to provide Rent, Interest and Profit for them. And the workers will be as poor as they were before.

One may reasonably prophesy that the Election will not appreciably alter the present position of the government. The oily-tongued leaders of the two big parties are mainstays of the capitalist State, with rich means and all the channels of their foul propaganda at their disposal. As proof of the S.P.O.'s. importance to the State, the party and the Trade Unions have signed

37,500,000 Schillings of the share capital of the share capital of the National Bank and have on its Board four members of the Generalräte: Gen. Directors A. Korp, first President, Editor, K. Ausch, Dozent Dr. Benedikt Kautsky (son of Karl Kautsky) and secretary, Dr. Stephen Wirlandner. It will be realized that it pays these men well to be members of the "Socialist" Party of Austria, but of the workers, who swell with their weekly or monthly membership dues and other contributions the funds of the Arbeiterbank, with more highly paid presidents and managers?

Even a certain shift in the political party constellation is not likely to seriously shake the position of the above arrivists. And if the "socialist" Presidents, Generalräte and Bank Directors should be in fear of anything happening to capitalism, capable of upsetting their jobs and befitting incomes, one of their comrades, the President of the Gewerkschaftsbund, tranquillized and reassured them. In a speech on the occasion of his 70th birthday and the founding of the Johann Böhm-Stiftung (alms in the form of scholarships for workers' children) he said that he was proud and happy to know that thanks to this fund "FUTURE GENERATIONS" would have less difficulty than he had 50 years ago to go to higher schools. So this "socialist" is satisfied and happy to think that the *inequality of men* in opportunities and in the rest of the

features of present-day society will remain with "future generations to come." Well, if the policy of the S.P.O. and the K.P. is allowed to be pursued, and continues to be supported by the mass of the people, then the invariably referred to as necessary "transition period" from capitalism to Socialism might wellnigh last to somewhere near eternity. Which is reassuring not only to the "socialist" Generalräte, Bank Directors and Presidents, but also to their paymasters, the Bourgeoisie, who could not bear the thought of *their* sons and daughters being dependent on the chance, and what they would consider, the humiliation and indignity of a miserable and miserly scholarship from a Johann Böhm, or other charitable Stiftung. Such things you know, are good enough for the children of the working class! How else, if not as sanctioning and taking for all time for granted the **INEQUALITY** of men—the very antithesis of Socialism—could the initiation of Stipendien "for future generations" be interpreted.

Yes, you workers, generations yet under capitalism! with privileges for the rich and poverty and humiliation for you and your children, that will be the lot of the working class, if you continue to place your trust in labour leaders and vote for "personalities" at election times instead of for the revolutionary **PRINCIPLE OF SOCIALISM!**

R.F.

## Study Class Notes

# HOW TO STUDY

To some extent methods of study must vary with the subject and the individual. These variations can be learned by experience only.

There is, however, a considerable body of principles which can be profitably applied to most subjects, and by most individuals.

2. *Scientific Methods.* First among these are logical methods of reasoning, and the application of "scientific methods."

In the course of ordinary daily life all people acquire some knowledge of logic and the "scientific methods." It is very desirable, however, that students should make a brief special study of these methods.

3. The intelligently critical attitude of mind. Constructive criticism. Challenging and seeking for reasons.

4. *Purpose.* The S.P.G.B. has a definite limited purpose. Learn to direct your energy and to avoid side issues.

5. *Note-taking.*

- (a) At lectures.
- (b) When reading books. First summarise in the writer's words. Then in own words.
- (c) Learn to "skim" books.

(d) Different methods for different subjects.

6. *Attitude towards "Authorities."*

- (a) Marx and Engels.

(b) "Public Men" (usually ignorant of specialised knowledge. Cabinet Ministers, for example, are rarely experts in their own Departments).

(c) Specialist in one field not dependable in another, even when seemingly closely allied. Admissions by opponents are not necessarily support for our case.

(e) Bias.

(f) Appreciate value of specialist's knowledge after discounting defects.

7. Value of Specialisation in one subject as an aid to learning methods of study in general.

8. *Necessity of knowing "the Other Side."*

- (a) Discussion with fellow students.
- (b) Discussion with opponents.
- (c) Read opponents' case.

9. Pamphlets as an introduction to fuller study.

10. *Reference Books.*

11. *Libraries.*

12. *Current Reading: Newspapers, etc.*

13. *Cuttings and Classification.*

14. *Expression. Speaking and Writing—*

- (a) Outdoor Meetings (b) Indoor Meetings (Lectures) (c) Debates (d) Personal Contacts (e) Writing.

15. *Warnings—*(a) Avoid Dogmatism

- (b) Avoid getting out of depth (c) Avoid going beyond evidence (d) Misuse of statistics.

16. *Conclusion.* Aim at knowledge and accuracy; not defeating opponents. (Past S.P. Controversies, e.g., Trade Unions, Increased Productivity, Reforms, Reformist Parties.)

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